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14 Nov. 2016

English 382

**Introduction**

Grammar is made up of many rules and concepts. Sometimes the rules are so ingrained in us that teachers have a hard time explaining them to their students. Other times the concepts are abstract and taught in upper level English classes. Regardless, grammar is the basis of language and it is complex and enriching of any language. Merriam-Webster defines grammar as “the set of rules that explain how words are used in language”. While this is accurate, grammar is much more nuanced than that. Three particular components of grammar that are important in writing, especially in the classroom, are compound sentences, subject-verb agreement, and the passive and active voices.

**Compound Sentences**

**Description of Concept**

Compound sentences are sentences with two or more independent clauses. There are three ways to link the to join independent clauses together: “(1) using coordinating conjunctions; (2) using the semicolon, either with or without conjunction adverbs; and (3), for limited situations, using the colon” (Kolln, Funk 216). Use of coordinating conjunctions would be “I wanted to buy a new phone, so I started looking for deals online”. This sentence can also be changed to use a semicolon, “I wanted to buy a new phone; I started to look for deals online”. And finally, the colon is used as a way to make an announcement, or complete the idea set up in the first clause, “I finally made my decision: I will buy the iPhone 6s at a cheaper price once the iPhone 7 comes out”. These three methods are the ones most commonly used when writing compound sentences.

Commas can also be used in compound phrases but they are not used with the conjunction. The exception to this rule is “but”because it introduces a contrast to the sentence and does not necessarily further the established idea (i.e. “I like babies, but I don’t want a child”). The coordinating conjunctions are usually “for”, “and”, “nor”, “but”, “or”, “yet”, and “so”. The serial comma, or commonly known as the oxford comma, can replace the conjunction “and”when there is a series or a list: “I bought a cat and a dog and a horse” versus “I bought a cat, a dog, and a horse”. The sentence listing out coordinating conjunctions is another example of the use of the serial comma.

**Why It’s Important to Good Writing**

Compound sentences are important to writing because they minimize choppy writing, allowing for a more cohesive narrative that flows. Having multiple “and’s” or short, simple sentences disrupts the flow of the narrative. They also add variety to writing, along with simple and complex sentences. “A compound sentence might combine two points” to make a narrative more cohesive (Ruday 37). Compound sentences also show the relationship between the two independent clauses.

**How I Would Teach It**

First and foremost is showing students examples from literature. As we have covered repeatedly in class, real examples from authors that students are familiar with help them understand the concept and the impact it can have on their writing. I would have the students find examples from their favorite books, not only does it bring in the student’s interest into play with learning. Since most students will have different favorite books, the examples will vary and will provide many concrete examples for students to see.

Ruday also suggests that highlighting the strength of the sentence type is an effective way to teach about compound sentences (Ruday 42). Following his method of mini-lessons on sentence types, it can lead to students forming their own reasons behind why a compound sentence would be used. Students can then come to the conclusion themselves which furthers their understanding. After they have found the examples, the students should “analyze the benefits of the examples they found” (Ruday 44). It forces the students to think about why an author has chosen to use this sentence type. I like Dr. Ruday’s chart and would give my students something similar so as to map out why it is beneficial to the piece of literature as to why the author used a compound sentence. I would then ask students to use compound sentences in their writing to help them apply the concepts that they have learned. If they can effectively use it in their own writing, that means they have an understanding of the concept. I would also teach the “FANBOYS” acronym to help my students remember the common coordinating conjunctions—this can be effectively taught through fun videos and music that lay out the acronym.

**Why I Would Teach it This Way**

I would teach compound sentences this way because it is effective and engaging. By having students bring in their own books and examples of compound sentences, they are able to see that this grammatical concept is present even in their favorite forms of media and not just an old grammatical concept they are being forced to learn. Students can see the purpose behind a writer’s decision to use compound sentences when they are asked to analyze it. By using current media and references that students know, lessons can be more relatable and memorable. Using music—for the acronym “FANBOYS” or even for finding examples of this sentences in song lyrics allows students to choose their own examples that allows them to further their understanding.

**Subject-Verb Agreement**

**Description of Concept**

Subject-verb agreement is exactly how it sounds. The verb of the sentence needs to be in agreement with the subject—whether it is singular or plural. Plural subjects need plural verbs and singular subjects must employ singular verbs. An example of subject-verb agreement for the singular is “George is eating dinner”; an example for plural agreement is “They are eating dinner”. The tense of the sentence also can effect the form of the verb; however, agreement is still necessary. Most, but not all, verbs in the past tense do not change.

When nouns in the subject are connected by “and” the subject then becomes plural (i.e. “George and Fred are eating dinner”). If the subject contains “either/or” or “neither/nor” then the verb is determined by the subject that is closest to the verb. For example, “neither the dog nor the owners were able to find the ball”, owners is plural as is were. When the phrase is parenthetical, it is not considered a part of the main subject and therefore has no effect on the verb, “Fred, as well as his brothers, loves to play pranks on people”. When the nouns in the subject are alike then there is no question as to which verb form to use. Indefinite pronouns (anyone, everyone, someone, no one, and nobody) are singular subjects and need singular verbs.

**Why It’s Important to Good Writing**

Using subject-verb agreement creates clear sentences. Using the wrong verb with a subject can cause confusion for the reader and distort the meaning of the sentence; “if pronoun reference is unclear or subjects and verbs don’t agree, readers will spend more time figuring out what the author meant to say than enjoying the piece” (Ruday 17). With the confusion in the sentence, the author loses impact and the reader loses a sense of enjoyment of the piece they are reading. Subject-verb agreement is important to make writing as effective and clear as possible.

**How I Would Teach It**

Once again, I would have students find examples from literature where subject-verb agreement occurs. I would also show them examples to provide and idea and context for what they are supposed to be seeing. After the students have found their examples, the students should identify what the subject and verb are and if they are plural or singular.

An activity that I would give to students is provide them with example sentences that contain a variety of sentences. Some would have the proper subject-verb agreement while others would not. Students would then identify if it is correct or not; if it is wrong they would have to fix it to where the subject and verb match and explain why (i.e. verb was plural while the subject was singular and now the verb is singular). This activity asks the students to look at how the sentence’s meaning could get mixed up without agreement. It also leads into Dr. Ruday’s next suggestion of teaching which is “talk with students about how subject-verb agreement makes writing effective” (Ruday 22). This can be done through the students own written examples or through the literary examples they have found. I would have them explain why the verbs and subjects agreeing makes the writing clearer and precise versus the confusion if they did not agree.

**Why I Would Teach it This Way**

I would teach it this way because providing students with concrete examples is an important way for them to understand this concept. This is one that is ingrained in our minds as something that either sounds right or does not. That can make this concept a little more difficult to teach because teachers and students alike already have preconceived notions of subject-verb agreement. This worksheet idea that I would like to implement forces students to analyze why the verb should be written so it matches the subject. It allows for a deeper analysis and knowledge—especially when the students are then expected to write their own sentences and consider the effects of subject-verb agreement on writing.

**The Passive and Active Voices**

**Description of Concept**

The active and passive voices are used as a way to portray agency in writing. The active voice is when the subject of the sentence is performing the action—this person or thing is often called “the agent” of the sentence. In the passive voice, the subject is not the agent. The direct object in an active voice sentence becomes the subject; the active would read “Ron ate twelve hamburgers” while passive voice would be “The twelve hamburgers were eaten by Ron”. Ron is the agent in the first sentence and he is the focus. In the passive voice the focus is shifted from Ron to twelve hamburgers. In the passive voice, one does not need to include the name as “the twelve hamburgers were eaten” can stand on its own and is the subject of the sentence.

**Why It’s Important to Good Writing**

Depending on which voice the writer uses, it can change the impact of the writing. The active voice is direct and clear. The focus of the active voice is on who or what performed the action— “We made mistakes”. The emphasis of passive voice is on the action completed and what was impacted by those actions. The author may want to take the focus away from who or what performed the action— “Mistakes were made”. Depending on the way the sentence is written, the entire focal point is shifted and changes the meaning of the sentence.

**How I Would Teach It**

I would show students passages from literature that are examples of passive and active voices. Providing students with clear examples can allow them to see how the passive voice or the active voice is present in literature in relevant and interesting ways. They can also then take the published sentence and change it from active voice to passive voice or vice versa. By changing the voice, they change the intent of the sentence. That is a good way for students to see why an author chose a particular voice over the other. I would ask students to work in partners for an activity. Partner 1 would write three to four sentences in the passive voice and Partner 2 would write in the active voice. They would then switch paragraphs and rewrite their partner’s paragraph in the opposite voice. After they have completed this, they will discuss how the two voices compare and the impact they make on the overall story written. We would come together as a class and share what each group found.

**Why I Would Teach it This Way**

By having students write their own examples in one voice, they are able to recognize how the stress or focal point of a sentence or passage can change. The activity allows them to work with a partner as a way to engage all students and not have them be left out. By having students change the voice from active to passive or passive to active also shows a fluency and deep understanding of this concept if they are able to do it successfully. I believe it is important as writers to know how and when to use the active voice or the passive voice.

**Conclusion**

Grammar is complex and interesting and there are many ways to go about teaching it. However, a very effective method for teaching any form of grammar involve using examples from well-known literature so that students have that proper example. They can take that example and change it or analyze it to further understand the concept. Another effective method is showing students relatable examples from songs, TV shows, or movies—this makes the lesson more memorable and shows students that grammar is beyond the classroom. Teaching each concept follows a similar formula and I believe that as a teacher, I will employ many of Dr. Ruday’s recommendations because I believe they are engaging, effective, and fun.

**Works Cited**

1. Kolln, Martha, and Robert Funk. Understanding English Grammar. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2012. Print.
2. Ruday, Sean. The Common Core Grammar Toolkit: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Language Standards in Grades 3-5. Larchmont: Eye on Education, 2013. Print.

To answer your question as to my superpower, it is a tie between instant teleportation and shape shifting. Shape shifting would be so cool because I would be able to experience life through different animals, insects, and potentially even people (I’d want to shift into other people, too). However, instant teleportation would be amazing because then I would be able to travel anywhere and see the world. I could visit my mom and my friends whenever I wanted; but more importantly, I could leave very embarrassing situations much more easily.